

# Sentence Structure Part Two

(COM3221)

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*In this course, you will...*

- Describe how a subject and verb should align
- Identify verb and pronoun shifts
- Describe noun and pronoun cases

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## Sentence Structure Part Two

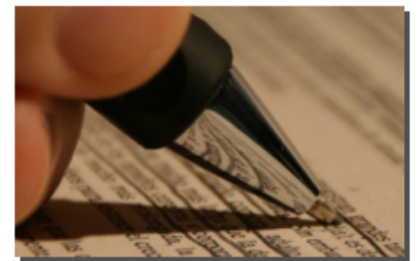
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### Introduction

We learned in Sentence Structure Part One that compound subjects are joined by and usually require a plural verb. Compound subjects joined by other words and phrases require a little more investigation.

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## Subject-Verb Agreement

When compound subjects are joined by any of the following, the verb agrees with the subject closest to the verb.

"or"

"nor"

"either/or"

"neither/nor"

"not only/but also"

**Either the plaintiff or the defendants are lying.** "Defendants" is plural.

**Either the defendants or the plaintiff is lying.** "Plaintiff" is singular.

Remember, the verb should match in number with the nearer subject.

**Not only the horse but also the pigs were scared by the storm.**

**Running or tennis is my favorite sport.**

**Running and tennis are my favorite sports.** Compound subjects joined by and take a plural verb.

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## Plural Subjects

When you are writing, it is usually best to stick the plural subject closest to the verb. Read the following two sentences aloud and compare.

**Neither the teacher nor the students are playing in the street.**

**Neither the students nor the teacher is playing in the street.**

While both sentences are grammatically acceptable, matching a plural subject to a plural verb tends to be most recognizable for the listener.





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## Indefinite Words

When indefinite pronouns like "neither" are not part of a compound subject, the verb should be singular.

**Neither is a boy.**

**Either is a fine choice.**

The following indefinite pronouns also take singular verbs.

**anybody  
everybody  
somebody**

**anything  
everything  
something**

**anyone  
everyone  
someone**

**one  
no one  
other  
another**

**each  
every  
much**

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## Indefinite Words (continued)

Examples:

**Everyone needs a key to the office.**

**Something is going to happen if I don't get a key.**

Be careful not to confuse "no one," an indefinite pronoun that means "not one person," with "none," which can have the same meaning but can take a plural verb.

**No one is willing to listen to your speech.**

**None are going to listen to your speech.**

In the following sentence notice that "each" is not affected by the plural of "volunteers"-- the verb remains singular because "volunteers" is not part of the subject.

**Each of the six volunteers has a new assignment.**



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## Indefinite Words (continued)

Some indefinite words require singular or plural verbs, depending on the meaning of the subject. Examples include: **all, any, enough, most, none, and some.**

**All that she wants is a new bicycle.** Singular (the object is one thing, a bicycle)

**Some of the water from the lake is gone.** Singular (an amount is singular)

**All of the new bicycles are very expensive.** Plural (there is more than one bicycle)

**Some of the lakes are very shallow.** Plural (there is more than one lake)

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## Indefinite Words (continued)

A prepositional phrase immediately after the indefinite pronoun is a great clue to the number of the subject. If you take out the preposition and use the pronoun as an adjective, how would the sentence read? The following examples are plural.

**Any of the sailors are eligible for discounts.**

**Most of the discounts are not very substantial.**

The following examples are singular.

**Enough for her is enough for me.**

**All of it is required for completion.**



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## Indefinite Words (continued)

These words always take plural verbs when they are pronouns and the subjects of sentences: **both, few, many, others, several.**

**Both of us are going for a ride to Grand Canyon.**

**Few are going to notice that we are skipping work.**

**Many look out their windows and see us leaving.**

**Others have called our phones and received no answer.**

**Several are jealous and want to come along.**

These pronouns take the place of more than one person and should receive a plural verb.



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## Checking Verb Agreement

One way to check for the correct verb agreement is to insert the nouns that the pronouns might be replacing. For instance, the following phrases sound natural to the ear.

**Few employees are going to notice.**

**Many employees look out their windows.**

**Several employees are jealous.**

So, these pronouns should take a plural verb.

**Few are going to notice.**

**Many look out their windows.**

**Several are jealous.**





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## Summary of Indefinite Pronouns

Here is a summary of how the indefinite pronouns of the last three screens act when they are the subjects of sentences. You may print this page for later reference.

## Singular

another everything  
anybody much  
anyone no one  
anything one  
each other  
either somebody  
every someone  
everybody something  
everyone

## Singular or Plural

all  
any  
enough  
most  
none  
some

## Plural

both  
few  
many  
others  
several

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## Subject As an Amount

When the subject is an amount, it takes a singular verb. The following are some types of amounts.

**Quantity:** Sixteen pounds of mud was scraped off the side of the boat.

**Distance:** Four hundred yards is the width of the river.

**Money:** Two hundred dollars is the charge for renting a jet ski.

**Time:** Three hours on a raft is enough for a sunburn.

These subjects are all singular because they are describing one amount, not many articles of the amount. The width of the river, for example, is one amount, which is 400 yards.

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## Subject As an Amount (continued)

This can be a confusing topic, so let's look at a few more examples.

**Five dollars is the money in my wallet.**

**Five dollar bills are in my wallet.**

The first sentence is singular because the speaker refers to a quantity, five dollars, as a single amount. In the second sentence the five individual bills require a plural verb because they are separate items being counted, not a single quantity. Let's look at another pair.

**Two hundred pounds of turkey was delivered to the shelter.**

**Two hundred turkeys were delivered to the shelter.**



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## Subject As an Amount (continued)

Some expressions can vary between amounts that take singular verbs and numbers that take plural verbs.

**A large percentage is voting against the incumbent.**

**Forty percent of the students are voting against the incumbent.**

**Forty percent of the student body is voting against the incumbent.**

The first sentence is singular because it expresses an amount. The percentage that votes in the particular way is one entity, one amount. The second sentence is plural because it refers to the plural, students, performing the action. The third sentence is singular because it is an amount referring to the single quantity, student body.



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## Subject As an Amount (continued)

This topic can easily be confusing. The key is to know if the subject in question is working as a single, identifiable unit or is a reference to many parts.

**Two thirds of the soldiers are wounded.** Plural

**Half of the navy is at sea.** Singular

**The rest of the story is boring.** Singular

**The rest of the books are boring.** Plural



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## Other Subject-Verb Agreement Rules

There are a few more important rules to follow for acceptable subject-verb agreement. Some subjects (known as collective nouns) refer to groups yet usually take singular verbs.

**The team from the research department was the first to complete the assignment.**

**The jury is unable to reach a verdict.**

**The staff want a pay raise.**

In these examples a group of people is acting as one body and therefore takes a singular verb. Other nouns that can act in this way include: **family, crowd, class, committee, herd.**





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## Other Subject-Verb Agreement Rules

The key to remember is that these words take a singular verb when they act as a single body. There can be exceptions.

**The jury were quizzed by the press after the trial.**

In this case, the jury is not being talked to as a group but as individual persons. The situation could be clarified by changing the noun.

**The jurors were quizzed by the press after the trial.**



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## Other Subject-Verb Agreement Rules

Some words look plural but usually take singular verbs.

**Physics is not my best subject.**

**The news is information about world events.**

Other words look plural but refer to a single object. These words still take plural verbs.

**My pants are worn out at the knees.**

**The eyeglasses are being straightened.**

If you are unsure of the number of a noun, it is best to consult a dictionary for guidance.



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## Other Subject-Verb Agreement Rules

There are words ending in "s" that can be either singular or plural, depending on usage.

**Politics is a topic that irritates some people.**

**The governor's politics are irritating to some people.**

In the first sentence the verb is singular because the subject is a single thing, the theory of politics. In the second sentence, however, the subject refers to multiple acts. The governor's politics could be numerous decisions, speeches or actions over time, and a plural verb is thus best. Here is another set.

**Statistics is the science of numerical data.** Singular (the subject is a single abstract thought)

**The statistics are recorded every week.** Plural (many individual items comprise the subject)

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## Knowledge Check

Next, you will check your understanding of the material presented so far. Your grade on this section does not count toward your final course grade.

If you are not able to answer several of the questions correctly, or you feel you have not acquired a competency of the material covered so far, review the content of this chapter again.

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## Knowledge Check (continued)

1. What is the correct **verb** for this sentence:

Many \_\_\_\_\_ early release through good behavior.

- ☐ *gains*
- ☐ *gain*

Submit Answer

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## Knowledge Check (continued)

2. What is the correct **verb** for this sentence:

The crowd of felons \_\_\_\_\_ to the warden's speech.

- ☐ *listens*
- ☐ *listen*

Submit Answer

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## Knowledge Check (continued)

3. What is the correct **verb** for this sentence:

Eight years \_\_\_\_ the sentence handed out by the judge.

- ☐ **is**
- ☐ **are**

Submit Answer

## Knowledge



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Click the next arrow to continue.

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## Verb and Pronoun Shift

In the last chapter, we studied subject-verb agreement, making the two elemental components of a sentence match in number. Individual parts of a sentence need to agree when there is more than one verb or pronoun. When two verbs in a sentence do not correctly match each other in tense, the error is called a verb shift. A pronoun shift occurs when pronouns are mismatched in number.

These two common errors are the focus of this chapter.



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## Nominative and Objective Cases

When the pronoun is the subject of an implied verb, a nominative case is used.

**Nominative Examples:**

**He** paints better than **she** (paints).  
**He** is more artistic than **she** (is).

When the pronoun refers to the object of the verb, an objective case is used.

**Objective Examples:**

**There is no** better painter than **him**.  
**He** is a better artist than **her**.



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## Verb Shifts

When sentences have multiple clauses and more than one verb, it is important that the verbs make sense in the tense used. The main tenses of a verb are present, past, and future.

**Today I am taking the bus to work, although yesterday I drove the car.**

The example sentence includes two verbs. "Am taking" is in the present tense; it describes current action. "Drove" is in the past tense; it describes the action of the past (yesterday). The sentence is a good example of matching the verb tense to the meaning of the action. Compare this usage to that of the sentence on the next screen.



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## Verb Shifts (continued)

**Neil Armstrong landed on the moon in 1969 and makes a giant leap for mankind.**

In this sentence there are two tenses represented: the past, "landed," and the present, "makes." The activities of landing on the moon and making a giant leap occurred in the same period, and so they should have the same verb tense:

**Neil Armstrong landed on the moon in 1969 and made a giant leap for mankind.**





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## Verb Shifts (continued)

When we tell a story about a past event, we often use the present tense. This practice is acceptable grammar as long as the verbs match in tense.

"First Neil Armstrong lands on the moon, and then he makes a giant leap for mankind."



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## Verb Shifts (continued)

Determine if the sentences below have matching verb tense. By clicking on each sentence, you can see a possible revision.

**There are 47 other states when Arizona came into the union in 1912.**

**Elmer visited the Grand Canyon and leaves behind his rifle.**



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## Verb Shifts (continued)

When the time of the action changes in a sentence, the verb tense should change as well. Consider this example:

**Charles Barkley played for the Phoenix Suns, and now he works as a commentator.**

Mr. Barkley played in the past, so the verb should be in the past tense. He works as a commentator presently, so the verb should be in the present tense. This example shows that a verb shifting with the meaning of the sentence is acceptable grammar.



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## Verb Shifts (continued)

When two verbs shift in tense, they should match the story of the sentence. Here are two examples of shifting verbs—one correct, one incorrect.

**When the store had a sale, Jane uses additional coupons.**

Incorrect. These two events occurred simultaneously and thus should have matching verb tense.

**Jane bought the wine in March, and she is tasting it now for the first time.**

Correct. The first action occurred in the past, and past tense is used for the verb bought. As she tastes the wine presently, the present tense is used for this action.



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## Pronoun Shifts

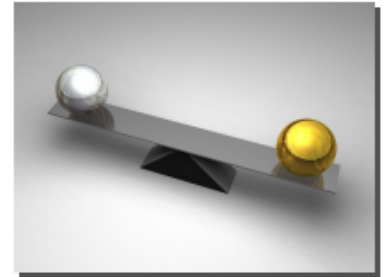
We now move from verb shifts to pronoun shifts. Just as verbs need to match in time, pronouns need to match in number.

**If one wants to become an international airline pilot, they have to learn English.**

In this example the pronouns have shifted in number. "One" is singular, and "they" is plural. Because the pronouns are referring to the same entity, this is unacceptable grammar. Possible revisions are below:

**If one wants to become an international airline pilot, one has to learn English.** "One," "pilot," "one," and "has" are all singular.

**If students want to become international airline pilots, they have to learn English.** "Students," "pilots," "they," and "have" are all plural.



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## Pronoun Shifts (continued)

Here is another example of a sentence that has an unacceptable pronoun shift.

**You need to tell your friend that they need to have their passport ready.**

The following are two possible resolutions.

**You need to tell your friend that she needs to have her passport ready.**

**You need to tell your friends that they need to have their passports ready.**

Click on the buttons below to see the singular words and the plural words.

Singular

Plural



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## Pronoun Shifts (continued)

The noun to which the pronoun refers is called the antecedent. When a sentence has more than one antecedent, there may be a cause for a change in number.

**Students should review their notes carefully before Mrs. Gardner's test because she will challenge their understanding fully on her exam.**

In this sentence pronouns refer to "students," which is a plural noun, and to Mrs. Gardner, which is a singular noun.

**Students = their notes, their understanding**

**Mrs. Gardner = she will challenge, her exam**



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## Pronoun Shifts (continued)

Knowing the antecedent will guide your selection of pronoun number. In the first sentence there is only one antecedent, and so the two pronouns should match in number. In the second sentence the pronouns refer to different items, and so they will match in number to their respective antecedents.

**All the animals ate their meals without using their paws.**

**The tiger ate its meal while the other animals waited for theirs.**



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## Pronoun Shifts (continued)

One method to avoid improper shifts between singular and plural pronouns is to rewrite both in the plural.

**Unacceptable:**

A person who interviews a company is more successful in their job search than one who waits for a company to interview them.

**Acceptable:**

People who interview a company are more successful in their job searches than those who wait for a company to interview them.

Though there is only one antecedent (person), the first sentence shifts from singular to plural throughout the sentence. If you read the first sentence aloud, it may sound familiar. There can be a natural shift in number in speech, usually matching a singular subject with a plural pronoun.

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## Pronoun Shifts (continued)

If you have a tendency to speak in that manner, then you will probably write your sentences with improper pronoun shifts as well. In your compositions, check that the antecedent matches in number with the preposition. Using "one" as a pronoun in speech often leads to pronoun shifts. Consider replacing that pronoun with others.

**If one cannot follow directions, they will fail the test.**

**If I cannot follow directions, I will fail the test.**

**If you cannot follow directions, you will fail the test.**

**If we cannot follow directions, we will fail the test.**

**If students cannot follow directions, they will fail the test.**

**If a student cannot follow directions, he or she will fail the test.**

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## Pronoun Shifts (continued)

Problems with agreement with antecedents can occur in simple sentences as well.

**A nervous person will worry themselves to death.**

The sentence may sound natural in speech, but it is unacceptable in writing. "Themselves" is a plural noun that does not match the singular antecedent, "person." The following is a common revision.

**A nervous person will worry himself or herself to death.**

Although grammatically correct, current trends shy away from the use of pronouns of gender. Again, changing the meaning of the sentence to plural can be the preferred solution.

**Nervous people will worry themselves to death.**



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## Pronoun Shifts (continued)

The following comparisons retain the original meanings but transform the sentences into the plural without using gender pronouns.

**If someone wants to volunteer, he or she should fill out the release forms.**

**Those who wish to volunteer should fill out a release form.**

**The average student will take 2,000 exams during his or her college career.**

**Students will take an average of 2,000 exams during their careers.**





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## Pronoun Shifts (continued)

Sometimes our language limits our ability to change our speech patterns into acceptable written sentences. When the pronouns cannot be easily changed, you may need to alter the subject of the sentence, as in the example below.

**If anyone calls, tell them I'm busy.**

"Anyone" is always singular, as we learned in a previous chapter, but "them" is plural. While this phrase is very common in speech, it is best to avoid it in writing.

How would you rephrase it?



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## Pronoun Shifts (continued)

These following revisions are grammatically acceptable and retain the original meaning, even though the subject of each sentence has been changed.

**Please tell anyone who calls that I am busy.**

**You may tell anyone who calls that I am busy.**

**Everyone who calls should be told that I'm busy.**

**Tell all callers that I'm busy.**

**If anyone calls, the response is that I'm busy.**



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## Pronoun Shifts (continued)

When plural words come between a singular word and its pronoun, the pronoun still needs to be singular.

**Each of the caring women donated their last paycheck to help the cause.**

This is another sentence that can be grammatically confusing. The sentence is frequent in spoken conversation and may sound natural. However, the pronoun "their" is plural and does not agree with the singular subject "each." The plural word "women" comes between the two and throws off the sound. You may form a more acceptable sentence by making the subject plural or the other pronoun singular.

**All of the caring women donated their last paychecks to help the cause.**

**Each of the caring women donated her last paycheck to help the cause.**

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## Knowledge Check (continued)

1. What is the correct **verb** for this sentence:

When I ate the apple, I \_\_\_\_ sick.

- ☐ *feel*
- ☐ *felt*

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## Knowledge Check (continued)

2. What is the correct **verb** for this sentence:

I went back to the vendor and \_\_\_\_\_ everything else.

- ☐ *returns*
- ☐ *returned*

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## Knowledge Check (continued)



3. Which represents the most acceptable sentence for professional writing:

- ☐ *One should be punctual if they want to be promoted.*
- ☐ *She should be punctual if she wants to be promoted.*
- ☐ *The sentences are equally acceptable.*

Knowledge



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## Chapter Complete



You have completed the Verb and Pronoun Shift chapter. Next, you will explore pronoun cases.

Click the next arrow to continue.

Chapter



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## Pronoun Cases

In this chapter we continue our study of pronouns. In addition to having the correct number, pronouns must also have the correct case. Many people often select the correct case with ease and without thinking. However, there are numerous circumstances which can trouble everyone.



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## Common Cases

Pronouns need to match not only in number but case as well. Case refers to the category of nouns and pronouns that provide meaning to the function of the words. You may already be aware of the names of the common cases.

	Subjective (Nominative) Case	Objective Case	Possessive Case
<b>Personal Pronouns</b>			
<b>Singular</b>			
First Person	I	Me	My, mine
Second Person	You	You	Your, yours
Third Person	He, she, it	Him, her, it	His, her, hers, its
<b>Plural</b>			
First Person	We	Us	Our, ours
Second Person	You	You	Your, yours
Third Person	They	Them	Their, theirs

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## Subjective Pronouns

Subjective (also known as nominative) pronouns serve as the subjects of the sentence or clause.

**Her is the keeper of the flower garden.**

This is not an acceptable sentence because "her," an objective or possessive pronoun, is being used as the subject. The correct sentence is below.

**She is the keeper of the flower garden.**

Nominative pronouns: I, you, he, she, it, we, they



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## Objective Case

In the objective case the pronoun takes the action of something else. We use the objective case when the pronoun is a direct or indirect object of a verb or preposition. The following are some examples of the proper use of the objective case.

**Write me a letter explaining Dana's qualifications.**

The objective pronoun, "me," is the indirect object of the verb.

**Knowing that a secretary was needed, Russ recommended her.**

The objective pronoun, "her," is the direct object of the verb.

**Russ is not organized, and Dana will be a great help to him.**

The objective pronoun, "him," is the object of the preposition.

Objective pronouns: me, you, him, her, it, us, them



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## Possessive Case

In the possessive case the pronoun demonstrates ownership of something. The possessive personal pronoun can appear in many places in the sentence. All the examples below are good uses of the possessive case.

The trophy is mine.

Your effort was very good but not quite as interesting as theirs.

Our trophy is now on display; its shine can blind you!

**Please note:** possessive pronouns never take an apostrophe. "Its" is a possessive pronoun; "it's" is the contraction for "it is."

mine & ours  
yours  
his, hers, its,  
& theirs

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## Phrases of Comparison

Pronouns in phrases of comparison can also cause complications, but there are tests to perform to ease understanding of these rules as well. How would you finish the following sentence?

**Everyone was shocked, but no one was more surprised than (he/him).**

The first step to determine the proper case of the pronoun is to continue the sentence. Which of these sounds more natural?

**no one was more surprised than he was surprised**

**no one was more surprised than him was surprised**



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## Phrases of Comparison (continued)

In the previous example the nominative case should be used because the pronoun is acting as the subject of an implied statement.

**Everyone was shocked, but no one was more surprised than he (was).**

Here are some more examples:

**Roberto studies more than she (studies).**

**Ryan talks less than she (talks).**

**Roger exercises more often than she (does).**



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## Phrases of Comparison (continued)

The objective case can also be used in some circumstances of comparison. If the pronoun is being compared to the object of the sentence (not the subject), then the objective case is used.

**Kate, Bob, and Keith are friends. Kate likes Bob more than him.**

Him is a reference to Keith, and this sentence states that Kate likes Bob more than she likes Keith. Compare to this statement:

**Kate, Bob, and Keith are friends. Kate likes Bob more than he.**

This sentence is also grammatically acceptable, but it has a different meaning. In this case Kate likes Bob more than he (Keith) likes Bob.



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## Knowledge Check

Next, you will check your understanding of the material presented so far. Your grade on this section does not count toward your final course grade.

If you are not able to answer several of the questions correctly, or you feel you have not acquired a competency of the material covered so far, review the content of this chapter again.

Knowledge  
  
Check

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## Knowledge Check (continued)

1. What is the correct **pronoun** for this sentence:

We noticed on the label that the package was for \_\_\_\_.

- ☐ *she*
- ☐ *her*
- ☐ *hers*

Knowledge  
  
Check



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## Knowledge Check (continued)

2. What is the correct **pronoun** for this sentence:

The remaining cookies were eaten by \_\_\_\_ nurses.

- ☐ **we**
- ☐ **us**

Submit Answer

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## Knowledge Check (continued)

3. What is the correct **pronoun** for this sentence:

I began to realize that \_\_\_\_ three workers were the only ones left.

- ☐ **we**
- ☐ **us**

Submit Answer

Knowledge



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## Chapter Complete

You have completed the Pronoun Cases chapter. Next, you will take final exam.

Click the next arrow to continue.

Chapter  
  
Complete